



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FINALISM AND FREEDOM

HOWARD N. BROWN

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

One of the things difficult to explain in the world of thought was the sudden and overmastering impetus given to the theory of development by the publication of the works of Charles Darwin. The main idea of that theory, namely, that the higher orders of life had come into being through evolution from lower types, was by no means new; and there is so much among the plainest features of the world's life to suggest the idea, that one can only wonder why, if the scientific mind was waiting for, and wanting, the theory (as it appears to have been doing), it should not have taken it up long before Darwin's time.

Apparently, Darwin invested the theory with just sufficient philosophy to make it immediately the subject of world-wide debate. He gave it enough philosophical dress to permit the rising power of mechanistic belief to claim it and rely upon it; and to make it also, for the time being, the chief bugbear of the church. On the favoring tide of acrimonious discussion the new theory swiftly rose to eminence, and was soon enjoying one of the most notable triumphs of modern times. There are many who still speak of it, in its Darwinian form, with awe-struck tones and bated breath, as if it were a kind of sacred thing which must be held above suspicion and reproach. That, however, is the way in which the populace is apt to regard any popular idol; and it is not a very good certificate of divinity.

We probably owe Darwin an immense debt in that he was the instrument through which the idea of development became available in the world's thought. But concerning what may be regarded as his philosophy of development there has arisen much question; and it is likely to be found more and more deficient as time goes on. Its radical weakness is that it is obliged to rest everything ultimately on a basis of pure chance; for that is a foundation which is intolerable to the rational mind. That mind may be willing enough to allow for a considerable fortuitous ele-

ment running through existence; but it cannot make chance the fundamental ruling principle of the universe, without abandoning its own rationality.

And Darwinism really had nothing else to offer. Its "variations from type" were immediately due, of course, to changes of environment, or to different combinations of the two sexes employed for reproduction; but that those variations appeared in such wise as to enable the struggle for existence to build out of them something like a continuous progressive line, was, so far as it could explain, nothing but chance. That will not answer, in reason. It is impossible for the thinking mind to accept this as a solution of the riddle of the universe. Some further explanation of these variations must be found, before the hypothesis of development can claim to stand on a reasonable basis.

It would seem that in either of two ways the theory might be pieced out and amended to make good the deficiency. It might be supposed that, in the stream of life itself, the power of desire helped to bring forward the needed variation at the opportune moment. The antelope with longer legs was born, that is to say, because, in part, antelopes had a sense of wanting longer legs to enable them to escape from lions prowling in their vicinity. Or one can suppose that above the stream of life there is a power capable of determining the main direction of its flow. But either of these suppositions involves the assertion of a certain amount of directing intelligence; and when we put mind in charge of the process, it is not enough to say that this satisfies the intellectual necessities of the case. We have then to go back and consult the actual facts in order to learn how far they will bear out the hypothesis.

It is just at this point that the battle now rages, and seems likely to rage for some time to come. What do the facts say? What is the evidence in the case? If we had only to produce a satisfactory intellectual scheme of things, at least the main outline of such a structure is not so very difficult to sketch. But, having made a coat for the universe, we are now under the unhappy necessity of trying it on. We must see how it will fit; and there are plenty to tell us, at this moment, that the above suggested alterations in the cut of the garment do not improve the set of it in the least degree.

As to this, however, it is permissible to ask whether such denial of improvement is or is not the testimony of an unbiassed mind. Where there are signs of strong prejudice, we distrust a verdict upon the evidence even though rendered by an expert. Is the scientific mind perfectly dispassionate in its unwillingness to admit that the process of development has been noticeably shaped by a directing intelligence? It rather seems as if the controversial temper in much of this unwillingness were too plain to be altogether ignored or disguised. One does not know why we should expect human nature in scientific circles to be so very different from human nature in other spheres of thought and action; and it is nowhere easy for the mind, in dealing with any set of facts, to divest itself altogether of the prejudice which controversy has engendered.

Certainly, the man of rigid and thorough-going scientific training is now apt to be less scared about being caught in a situation which would put his moral reputation in serious jeopardy than of being betrayed into a manner of speaking which might indicate that he harbored the awful doctrine of "finalism." Better be a drunkard than a finalist, we can almost hear that man murmur, as he looks into the black depths of unreason to which belief in final causes may lead. Even in Bergson one can detect the inveterate feeling of strong disfavor and dislike for an idea which still carries the taint of scientific heresy. And it is not surprising that this feeling should still exist, or that it should have considerable weight in determining those views of existence which many people entertain. The special pleading of theology on behalf of its favorite notion of "design" has been enough to irritate a much more saintly person than the scientific man sets up to be, and the fight to win its freedom which science has been forced to make against the church is too recent to be wholly forgotten. On the whole we cannot wonder if the man of science is still nervous about being brought into too amicable relations with the theologian. He will edge away if he suspects a risk of being tarred with that brush which brands him as the friend and champion of theological ideas. Small blame to him, one must say! There are not so many theologians, even yet, in whose society one can feel either entirely comfortable or very proud; and it is

too much to ask of men who have for the most part sought the truth in entire simplicity and sincerity, that they should cease to remember the unmitigated disgust with which they have seen churchmen resorting to every known device to get away from the truth. But out of such a controversy as the last half-century has witnessed neither side is likely to emerge with an entirely unbiassed mind. And that fact ought to be remembered in estimating the soundness of positions taken on the main question now in dispute, the question, namely, as to what the evidence says about the presence of intelligence within, or over, the process of development.

The answer made to most that has heretofore been urged as an argument for design, is that it is easy enough to make out a case by selecting such facts as happen to agree with it. It is a perfectly good and sufficient answer to much that has been put forward in the past as a doctrine of finalism. But it can also be said that many a case which on the evidence as a whole is fairly entitled to stand, is wrecked if it be judged only by careful selection of the facts that do not agree with it. And one must say that the consensus of opinion among men of science still appears to lie somewhat open to the reproach of that kind of unfair judgment. It has not yet dealt dispassionately with the whole array of facts before us for inspection. It is disposed to make much of one part of the evidence and to belittle another part of it. It will not quite close with the question whether any amount of finalism seems to be involved in progressive development, being much intent upon the slaughter of a certain kind of design which theologians of the past have advocated and upheld. All this is so much in the partisan spirit that we outsiders have some right to discount the testimony which such experts give. The prisoner at the bar being "finalism," we may be inclined to say with them, "guilty, as charged in the indictment," but also we feel moved to say, "not so guilty as you seem to think." We do not consent that the culprit should be ordered to immediate execution. Rather we think he should be given a chance to amend his ways, and we strongly hope that he may yet prove to be a useful member of our household of ideas.

It seems probable that, when the evidence at our command can

be fairly weighed and sifted, it will abundantly justify the conclusion that some amount of intelligence is characteristic of life in all stages of its unfolding. At the present time, whatever may come afterward, we are not in sight of any scientific demonstration of a perfect mind at work in the process of organic development. The contention of religion that nature displays everywhere the unlimited power and skill of such a mind, science will not countenance. But science will have to admit in the end, we may reasonably conjecture, that what we know in ourselves as the phenomena of mind are not altogether absent from the behavior of life in any of its forms.

One may say about this admission, as a certain boy is said to have remarked about learning the alphabet, that it scarcely seems worth while to go through so much to get so little. And yet, all things considered, it is doubtless an achievement to get the scientific intellect to agree that in some measure the universe appears to know what it is doing. The difficulty of screwing that intellect up to this sticking-point is one that makes the career of Bergson, at this moment, decidedly interesting. It would not seem that the amount of wisdom which he is inclined to put into the process need frighten any one very much. Apparently, however, many are quick to suspect that if any wisdom is put back into nature, religion will have been killed all in vain.

However, Bergson appears to have taken that common-sense view of the situation which every candid mind will have to come to in the end. The point at issue is never likely to be settled by a demonstration, one way or the other. It is a question of the balance of probability, as all the evidence attainable is brought under survey. And when we come down to it, there appears to be likeness enough between ourselves and external nature to make it seem absurd to say that life is intelligent in us and wholly unintelligent outside. We may have all kinds of fine-spun theories to show how this other life gets on and makes progress, without in the least degree knowing what it wants, or seeing any next step before it. But after all, what is the good of these theories? They only serve to lead us back to that unthinkable foundation of chance. Meantime, the obvious conclusion is that life, everywhere, shows at least traces of mentality. What is the use of

asserting over and over that instinct in animals is not, and cannot be, but only looks as if it were, intelligent? That is the way it looks, and that is the way it is. If there be any mind in us, there is some mind there; and wherever there is mind, it is entirely proper to predicate purpose, finalism.

The quality which the theory of development needs to lift it out of the category of chance, where it stands as the despair of a rational intelligence, is the quality which can be read into it without difficulty from the most indubitable of all records; that is to say, a mental quality, sufficiently conscious of its needs and wants to determine the direction in which the stream of life shall run. The biologist, for his purposes, is not required to suppose anything like a perfect mind guiding the course of development. Indeed, he is likely to insist, to the end, that, so far as the evidence goes, it will warrant only the hypothesis of a quite limited intelligence. But so much he might grant without doing violence to any of the probabilities of the case. And the sooner he does grant this, the sooner he will free himself from a burden of useless and thankless labor; for the only great difficulty is that of thinking up ways by which to evade the rather patent certainty that, in some measure, the great powers of being understand what they are about.

This may do for the biologist; but obviously it comes far short of the requirements of the theist; though if the latter shall limit himself as he has latterly shown some disposition to try to do, to the idea of divine immanence, it is hard to see why he and the biologist are not practically one. A God who is merely "in the machine" has, it would seem, to accept the limitations of the machine. If there be no more of him than what is involved in, and implied by, its working, then its character is substantially his character. Theism, when it will have none but an immanent Deity, rather ties itself down to the biologist's standards. The only way by which it can then escape his thought of a limited mind at work in the world is to deal with the facts in a fashion which no biologist can sanction. Some people profess a theism thus capable of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds at the same moment; but probably their system of thought, stripped of pretence, would show only in rabbit-like

proportions. Other people frankly accept the alternative presented to them, and put up with a Deity who knows rather less than they do themselves; one who has perhaps something like equal power with them to guide the course of events; though why they should call this poor being God, and try to build their belief on him into a religion, is one of the surprising mysteries which an unaccountable human nature is always presenting to us.

By theism I do not mean anything bound up in these infantile swaddling-clothes. It is now sufficiently evident that, when the intellect proceeded to grind the world into mincemeat through its process of development, it did not grind the idea of creation out of it; though for a time it thought, with some glee, that this was what it had accomplished. By the same token, one might say, the idea of transcendence still survives that process of desiccation. Two atoms or two worlds swimming round each other, what does it matter? You have the same mystery in either case. Nothing constrains modern theism to give up the thought of divine transcendence, or to limit itself to the thought of immanence, unless it may be a kind of frantic desire to get rid of every last vestige of the idea of miracle; and if that be its purpose, decidedly the game is not worth the candle. Miracle, also, can be chopped up into very small pieces; but only to the superficial sight does it thereby disappear.

Let us boldly say that theism demands a Deity who, however he may be "in the machine," is not altogether of it; one who may not choose to interfere with the ordinary sequences of nature, but who is nevertheless big enough to upset them if he were so inclined. And if anybody asks where theism can get a Deity like that, perhaps it is enough to say that he can easily be found in that same storehouse which has furnished atoms and ions and light-bearing ether and various other things which eye never saw nor ear heard. That modern science, after some of its excursions in speculative fields, should come back accusing theism of being too fanciful, is simply a piece of what is called on the street "colossal cheek." Some philosophers may still say of God that they "have no need of that hypothesis." But a good many of us seem to realize a considerable need of that kind; and there is no

reason why we should be bashful in anybody's presence about taking what we want. Only, of course, we too have to reckon with the facts.

But what I should wish to point out is that our reckoning is by no means required to be identical with that of the biologist. He, so to speak, limits himself to a study of the machine, and he does not intend to go one step beyond what that study discloses to him. Theism starts out with an idea which transcends these limits. It is all folly to ask whether or not the facts of the outward world will prove its assumptions. It knows, or ought to know, at the beginning that it cannot prove its case from external nature. It does not get its ideas from that source, and it can hear without the least dismay that they have never been discovered there.

What theism has to do is to reconcile its ideas, in some measure, with existing facts. Where the biologist can only say that nature seems to display some limited degree of intelligence, theism is required to explain how that might be, though the intelligence behind nature were practically unlimited. And so long as it can make such explanations, in a fairly satisfactory way, it is not likely to ask leave or license of anybody for cherishing its faith.

Without doubt the difficulty of getting our theistic belief sufficiently in line with our knowledge of the world about us to relieve it from the charge of extravagance and unreality, has been of late somewhat increased. This thought of a low kind of mentality and an inadequate degree of energy evinced by the story of development looks like one that might be hard to get over. If all that we have to trust to is Life,—with a big L, to be sure, but only a feeble and fumbling life, after all,—that leaves us so far short of those heights where religion has heretofore supposed itself to be walking that climbing back seems quite out of the question. For with this millstone of a verdict hung about our necks, that the record proves a strictly limited intelligence at work, how can we climb at all? We could almost wish that the biologist had stuck to his former opinion of no intelligence at work; for then we knew he was simply guessing, and we were at liberty to disregard his guess.

But just here there is a suggestion to be made which appears

not to have received thus far the attention it deserves, and which much eases the situation. Theism has always had some trouble in adjusting itself to the facts of human life. The evil and sorrow of the world, as many have thought, could not be reconciled with the idea of an infinite goodness presiding over the life of man. Indeed, this difficulty must long ago have extinguished theistic belief, but for one of the assertions of our consciousness which no theorizing could ever quite put to silence. That, of course, is the assertion of an element of freedom in our life. Faith can take refuge in the thought that God does not intend or design these miseries which afflict mankind. They are the products of man's wrong use of the alternatives left to his choice; and God bears these miseries, with man, for the sake of having him trained and educated in freedom. The price of suppressing them would be the abandonment of man's essential being; and that price God is unwilling to pay. I do not see why, both in theory and practice, this is not an entirely sufficient answer to one of the difficulties which theism has to face. Not only so, but it appears to contribute to faith some of the noblest features it has ever attained. Both the character of God and the nature of his creative task are thereby much ennobled and enriched.

And now, I desire to ask, what hinders us from applying this same explanation to the whole field of organic life and the whole process of development? What right have we to assume in ourselves a monopoly of freedom any more than we assume there a monopoly of mind? It becomes increasingly probable that the roots of our faculty of conscious knowing go far down into primitive types of life below us. In this respect the creation of man begins very early in the history of development,—for aught we know, indeed, with the very first cell of living protoplasm. Is it not probable that our faculty of will is brought from an equal distance, and begins its training somewhere on the lower levels? And if one of the properties of life, from the very start of its career on the planet, has been some power of self-determination, then the method which we apply at the top to account for what we take to be shortcomings in humanity, will apply all the way down. What appears to be the work of a limited intelligence is just that; only it is not God's intelligence which is thus shown to be imper-

fect, but the intelligence of his creatures painfully learning to take some tiny steps alone.

In other words, are we not apt to be still rather incomplete evolutionists, making too sharp a line of division between ourselves and the orders of life beneath us? and when we fully realize that we can be what we are only because there was some promise and potency of us in that out of which we have come, shall we not learn to regard the whole gradually unfolding line as something which was on its way, by the admixture of an element of freedom, toward the higher reaches of personality?

As for the tiger in man, we explain his persistent survival by saying that God has no power to stop him off; no way, that is, which would not involve desertion of the method by which personal life is brought into being. Have we any reason to think that this view of the case does not apply with equal force to that tiger which precedes man in the order of creation? If an element of freedom or self-determination runs through the whole course of organic development, in some measure that process has always held its fate in its own hands and cannot be judged as if it adequately or accurately represented at every moment the wish and purpose of an intelligence presiding over its course. The moment we stop thinking of development in mechanical terms, and begin to think of it in terms of life (as we know life in ourselves), we are able, it appears to me, to adjust our theism to the facts without doing damage either to them or to its essential meaning. And I see no more difficulty in combining the thought of divine oversight of the world with the thought of a certain amount of autonomy granted to what we call life than I find difficulty in asserting this of the relations between parent and child.

Meantime, if there is nothing to forbid our entertaining the suggestion that both freedom and purpose should be reckoned into the process of development, something remains to be said more positively concerning its applicability to the facts as we know them. That same "tendency to variation" which the original theory so calmly assumed might well be used to support such an interpretation.

Perhaps no bigger problem was ever more deftly covered up by a specious phrase than when this form of words, "a tendency

to variation," was adopted. For the whole behavior of life, as contrasted with that of other forces, is thereby summarized. It is as if one should speak of gravitation as a tendency of bodies to approach each other; supposing himself, by this description, to have explained all that needed explanation. Surely this inward pressure of life against the limitations that hem it in, to find some new outlet, speaks of a power that has a certain wilfulness or waywardness of its own. I do not mean to say that we can prove it to have freedom; but I do say that it will bear that hypothesis, if one is inclined to make it, rather better than it bears the character which mechanism puts upon it.

Still more, when we come to contrast those fields of existence in which development is manifested, with the larger fields of existence outside, the thought that some freedom must be affirmed of the former realm gains enormous probability. When we try to picture to ourselves what is going on in any cubic inch of space above our atmosphere, we see that we are face to face with an inconceivable perfection. Through that little point in the wide heavens pass an innumerable number of lines of light and gravitation, perhaps also of electricity, at every conceivable angle. We can only figure these as lines of pulsation or wave movement. At all events it is movement of some kind. In fact, at every point it is such a bundle or network of movements as our imaginations cannot begin to grasp. These different lines of force pass through each other, at staggering velocities, making such a texture as was never woven on any of our looms; and not the slightest jostling or inaccuracy can ever be detected where they thus meet and pass. The universe, in this broader aspect of it, must strike us as an entirely perfect machine. It is such a product as infinite skill and infinite power might well bring forth. It so far surpasses all the inventions we have made and all our imaginations of what human wisdom may one day achieve that we can only gaze in mute wonder upon these triumphs of a creative mind.

But when we turn to the province of life, we get a different impression. There we are not made to feel such precision of movement or such superabundance of power. We are shown, indeed, remarkable adaptations and contrivances; but they do not rise to the standard of perfect workmanship. It is said by

oculists, for example, that nowhere is there an entirely perfect eye. A few of the forms of nature seem finished and complete. The cat tribe, perhaps, might be considered the last word in physical perfection of a certain sort. But other forms appear clumsy, unfinished, and grotesque. As Hamlet said of certain men, one could imagine that "nature's journeymen had made them and not made them well." If at this moment we have anywhere a fresh, unbiassed, and original impression of the character of the life-stream as a whole, we get it perhaps through the mind of Bergson. Plainly it is the impression of a stream of energy barely sufficient to carry through the enterprises it begins; not always indeed sufficient, but sometimes failing or only succeeding by chance in surmounting the obstacles in its way. It is either a stream which holds some measure of a remarkable intelligence, or which simulates the possession of such intelligence in a curious way; but it does not impress Bergson, and can scarcely impress us, as the kind of intelligence one would like to worship.

Is not this, then, a very striking contrast? Throughout interstellar space, and pervading the form of every planet and sun, forces are at work whose action, so far as we can judge, is absolutely perfect. The movements of the heavenly bodies so synchronize, down to the minutest fraction of a second, and their revolutions are so maintained without halt or tremor, that we are left without the smallest chance to find fault in their behavior. Whether the universe grew or was made, at all events it is in this aspect a piece of work which we might fitly ascribe to the Almighty as being in every way worthy of his limitless mind. But with regard to the force that we know as life, it is a different story. There we have a manifestation of being which appears to feel its way, somewhat uncertain of its immediate ends, proceeding often by indirection toward what appears to be its destined goal, and displaying sometimes marked inadequacy to reach its end at all.

Are we not entitled to ask what such things mean? And what explanation can we devise for these facts better than that which theism is able to present? All that is, we say, comes forth from Infinite Mind, and in the larger mechanism of the universe this mind displays a power and skill, so far as we can judge, without

limit. But in our little corner of the universe this mind appears to have started a process whose end has been the evolution of personal beings. This process has not been merely mechanical. All along its creations have taken form, not alone as they were stamped in a mould of circumstance, but as they themselves have in part determined. To some extent this world of living things has created itself. An overruling intelligence has worked with it in such wise as to prevent utter failure on its part; yet, as we may conjecture, has trusted it to the utmost verge of safety to make its own way, and has displayed endless patience with it for the sake of bringing out its gift of self-determination. From first to last life shows limited intelligence, because God has waited for it to try its own experiments. No doubt it has brought forth much that is useless and much that is not seemly, but it has found its way at last to the creation of man; and may we not say that the whole of its history, whether of failure or success, stands thereby justified?

Is it not reasonable to affirm that the creation of such beings as we believe ourselves to be could have been brought to pass in no other way? The old Hebrew tradition has it that God fashioned man of the dust of the earth and then breathed into him the breath of life. But such a method, one may perceive, could have produced nothing better than a mechanical toy. Personality, as we know it, could only come, as it has come, out of long ages of free endeavor. Once we are accustomed to the thought that all growth implies an element of freedom, we can see that the failures of growing things give us no ground on which to impeach the divine wisdom and goodness. And with man here finally as the ultimate fruit of the great tree of life, shall we not declare that, whatever his cost, he is abundantly worth the price?

The price has been, indeed, incalculable, bewildering to think of. The groaning and travailing of creation to bring forth this son of God has been so awful that the little we can see of it almost overwhelms us. Yet give man the immortal career which religion proposes for him, and who will say that the suffering has been too much? If we might personify Mother Nature, let us rather imagine that, with all her agony, she was glad when her man-child was born.